

The Voice of the Pack

By EDISON MARSHALL

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

He called once to Lennox, snatched the shotgun that still stood where he had placed it in the corner of the room, and hastened to the corral. The mare whickered plaintively when he took her from her food.

When Snowbird first heard the step in the thickets beside her, she halted bravely and held her lantern high. She understood at last. The very extremity of the beams found a reflection in two very curious circles of greenish fire: a fire that was old upon the world before man ever rubbed two sticks together to strike a flame. Of course the dim rays had simply been reflected on the eyes of some great beast of prey.

She identified it at once. Only the eyes of the felines, with vertical pupils, have this identical greenish glare. The eyes of the wolves glow in the darkness, but the circles are usually bright points. Of course it was a cougar.

She didn't cry out again. Realizing at last the reality of her peril, her long training in the mountains came to her aid. That did not mean she was not truly and terribly afraid. The beast was hunting her. She couldn't doubt this fact. Curiosity might make a lion follow her, but it would never beget such a wild light of madness in his eyes as this she had just seen. She simply clamped down all her moral strength on her rising hysteria and looked her situation in the face. Her hand flew instinctively to her side, and the pistol leaped in the lantern light.

But the eyes had already blinked out before she could raise the weapon. She shot twice. The echoes roared back, unbelievably loud in the silence, and then abruptly died; and the only sound was a rustling of leaves as the cougar crouched. She sobbed once, then hurried on.

She was afraid to listen at first. She wanted to believe that her pistol fire would frighten the animal from her trail. She knew, under ordinary conditions, that it would. If he still followed, it could mean but one thing—that some unheard-of incident had occurred to destroy his fear of men. It would mean that he had knowingly set upon her trail and was hunting her with all the age-old remorselessness that is the code of the mountains.

For a little while all was silence. Then out of the hush the thickets suddenly crashed and shook on the opposite side of the trail. She fired blindly into the thicket. Then she caught herself with a sob. But two shells remained in her pistol, and they must be saved for the test.

Whisperfoot the cougar, remembering the lessons of his youth, turned from the trail when he had first heard Snowbird's step. He had crouched and let her pass. She was walking into the wind; and as she was at the closest point a message had blown back to him.

The hair went straight on his shoulders and along his spine. His blood, running cold an instant before from fear, made a great leap in his veins. A picture came in his dark mind: the chase for a deer when the moon had set, the stir of a living thing that broke twigs in the thickets, and the leap he had made. There had been blood, that night—the wildness and the madness and the exultation of the kill. Of course there had been terror first, but the terror had soon departed and left something lying warm and still in the thickets. It was the same game that walked his trail in front—game that died easily and yet, in a vague way he did not understand, the noblest game of all. It was living flesh, to tear with talon and fang.

All his training, all the instincts imbedded in him by a thousand generations of cougars who knew this greatest fear, were simply obliterated by the sudden violence of his hunting-madness. He had tasted this blood once, and it could never be forgotten. The flame leaped in his eyes. And then he began the stalk.

A cougar, trying to creep silently on its game, does not move quickly. It simply steals, as a serpent steals through the grass. Whisperfoot stalked for a period of five minutes, to learn that the prey was farther away from him at every step.

He trotted forward until he came close, and again he stalked. Again he found, after a few minutes of silent creeping through the thickets, that he had lost distance. Evidently this game did not feed slowly, like the deer. It was to be a chase, then.

Again he trotted within one hundred feet of the girl.

Three times more he tried to stalk before he finally gave it up altogether. This game was like the porcupine—simply to be chased down and taken. And in the case of all animals that hunt their game by overtaking it, there was no longer any occasion for going silently. The thing to do was to come close and spring from the trail behind.

Though the fear was mostly gone, the cougar retained enough of that caution that most wild animals exhibit when hunting a new game so that he didn't attempt to strike Snowbird down at once. But as the chase went on, his passion grew upon him. Ever he crept nearer. And at last he sprang full into the thickets beside her.

At that instant she had shot for the first time. Because the light had left his eyes before she could find aim, both shots had been clean misses. And terrible as the reports were, he was too engrossed in the chase to be frightened away by mere sound. This was the cry the man-pack always made—these sudden, startling sounds in the silence. But he felt no pain. He crouched a moment, shivering. Then he bounded on again.

The third shot was a miss too: in fact, there had been no chance for a hit. A sound in the darkness is as unreliable a target as can possibly be imagined. And it didn't frighten him as much as the others. He waited, crouching, and the girl started on.

She was making other sounds now—queer, whimpering sounds not greatly different from the bleat that the fawn utters when it dies. It was a fear-sound, and if there is one emotion with which the wild beasts are acquainted, in all its phases, it is fear.



She Shot Twice.

She was afraid of him, then, and that meant he need no longer be in the least afraid of her. His skin began to twitch all over with that terrible madness and passion of the flesh-hunters.

This game was like the deer, and the thing to do was lie in wait. There was only one trail. He wasn't afraid of losing her in the darkness. She was neither fleet like the deer nor courageous like Wolf the bear. He had only to wait and leap from the darkness when she passed.

When Dan Felling, riding like mad over the mountain trail, heard the third shot from Snowbird's pistol, he felt that one of the debts he owed had come due at last. He seemed to know, as the darkness pressed around him, that he was to be tried in the fire. And the horse staggered beneath him as he tried to hasten.

He showed no mercy to his mount. Horse-flesh isn't made for carrying a heavy man over such a trail as this, and she was red-nosed and lathered before half a mile had been covered. He made her leap up the rocks, and on fairly level stretches he loosed the reins and lashed her into a gallop. Only a mountain horse could have stood that test. He gave no thought to his own safety. His courage was at the test, and no risk of his own life must interfere with his attempt to save Snowbird from the danger

that threatened her. He didn't know when the horse would fall with him and precipitate him down a precipice, and he was perfectly aware that to crash into a low-hanging limb of one of the great trees beside the trail would probably crush his skull. But he took the chance. And before the ride was done he found himself pleading with the horse, even as he lashed her sides with his whip.

The lesser forest creatures sprang from his trail, and once the mare leaped high to miss a dark shadow that crossed in front. As she caught her stride, Dan heard a squeal and a rattle of quills that identified the creature as a porcupine.

By now he had passed the first of the worst grades, coming out upon a long, easy slope of open forest. Again he urged his horse, leaving to her keen senses alone the choosing of the path between the great tree trunks.

Then he heard Snowbird fire for the fourth time; and he knew that he had almost overtaken her. The report seemed to smash the air. And he lashed his horse into the fastest run she knew—a wild, sobbing figure in the darkness.

"She's only got one shot more," he said. He knew how many bullets her pistol carried; and the danger—whatever it was—must be just at hand. Underbrush cracked beneath him. And then the horse drew up with a jerk that almost hurled him from the saddle.

He lashed at her in vain. She was not afraid in the darkness and the rocks of the trail, but some Terror in the woods in front had in an instant broken his control over her. She reared, snorting; then danced in an impotent circle. Meanwhile, precious seconds were fleeing.

He understood now. The horse stood still, shivering beneath him, but would not advance a step. The silence deepened. Somewhere in the darkness before him a great cougar was waiting by the trail, and Snowbird, hoping for the moment that it had given up the chase, was hastening through the shadows squarely into its ambush.

Whisperfoot crouched lower; and again his long serpent of a tail began the little vertical motion that always precedes his leap. He had not forgotten the wild rapture of that moment he had inadvertently sprung on Landy Hildreth—or how, after his terror had died, he had come creeping back. He hunted his own way, waiting on the trail; and his madness was at its height. He was not just Whisperfoot the coward, that runs at the shadow of a tall form in the thickets. The consummation was complete, and that single experience of a month before had made of him a hunter of men. His muscles set for the leap.

So intent was he that his keen senses didn't detect the fact that there was a curious echo to the girl's footsteps. Dan Felling had slipped down from his terrified horse and was running up the trail behind her, praying that he could be in time.

Snowbird heard the pat, pat of his feet; but at first she did not dare to hope that aid had come to her. She had thought of Dan as on the far-away marshes; and her father, the only other living occupant of this part of the Divide, might even now be lying dead in his house. In her terror, she had lost all power of interpretation of events. The sound might be the cougar's mate, or even the wolf pack, jealous of his game. Sobbing, she hurried on into Whisperfoot's ambush.

Then she heard a voice, and it seemed to be calling to her. "Snowbird—

I'm coming, Snowbird!" a man's strong voice was shouting. She whirled with a sob of thankfulness.

At that instant the cougar sprang. Terrified though she was, Snowbird's reflexes had kept sure and true. Even as the great cat leaped, a long, lithe shadow out of the shadow, her finger pressed back against the trigger of her pistol. She had been carrying her gun in front of her, and she fired it, this last time, with no conscious effort. It was just a last instinctive effort to defend herself.

One other element affected the issue. She had whirled to answer Dan's cry just as the cougar left the ground. But she had still been in range. The only effect was to lessen, in some degree, the accuracy of the spring. The bullet caught the beast in mid-air; but even if it had reached its heart, the momentum of the attack was too great to be completely overcome. Snowbird only knew that some vast, relentless power had struck her, and that the darkness seemed to roar and explode about her.

Hurled to her face in the trail, she did not see the cougar sprawl on the earth beside her. The flame in the lantern almost flicked out as it fell from her hand, then flashed up and down, from the deepest gloom to a vivid glare with something of the effect of lightning flickering in the sky. Nor did she hear the first frenzied thrashing of the wounded animal. Kindly unconsciousness had fallen, obscuring this and also the sight of the great cat, in the agony of its wound, creeping with broken shoulder and bated claws across the pine needles toward her defenseless body.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Moral Forces.

Above all it is ever to be kept in mind that not by material but by moral force are men and their actions governed. How noiseless is thought! No rolling of drums, no tramp of squadrons, or immeasurable tumult of baggage wagons, attends the movement. In what obscure and sequestered places may the head be meditating which is one day to be crowned with more than imperial authority; for kings and emperors will be among its ministering servants; it will rule not over but in their heads, and with these its solitary combinations of ideas, as with magic formulas, bend the world to its will. The time may come when Napoleon himself will be better known for his laws than for his battles; and the victory of Waterloo prove less momentous than the opening of the first metaphysics institute.—Thomas Carlyle.

First Payment of Rent.

It would be hard to find exact records of the first rent paid. It is said that when the Germans conquered parts of Gaul, the land was parceled out to chiefs, lieutenants and private soldiers. In return the holders of the lands promised military service when needed. Some of the land was given to favorites, who were allowed to pay in money instead of service, and the system was established. Rent was certainly known in the days that Rome flourished, there being Latin names for rent under long leasehold tenure; rent of a farm, ground rent, rent of state lands and the annual rent payable for the right to the perpetual enjoyment of anything built on the surface of the land.

Slept Thirty-Two Years.

Surely a subject for the speculative psychologist is the record sleep indulged in by Caroline Ohlson, a Swedish girl. In 1875, when only a child of fourteen years, she fell into a long trance in the island of Okuko, in the Baltic, and remained unconscious for 32 years. Food was administered to her, although she seemed quite unconcerned. Now did she respond to any inquiry during that long time. Then suddenly she awoke, no longer a girl, but a middle-aged woman, and the most careful examination could not reveal the slightest weakness or mental effect. After coming out of her long trance Caroline enjoyed very good health.

Many a man has risked acquiring a wife in order to acquire a sister.

WORLD'S MOST LONELY SPOT

Not a Desolate Island Nor the Center of a Crowded City, but the Unfriendly Heart.

Asked to name the loneliest place in the world, a traveler once answered, "The island of Tristan d'Acunha, far off the coast of South America. Its population is 76, and it is visited by a vessel only once in two years."

But the traveler was all wrong. Isolated, remote, limited in society, the island may be. But why loneliness? The last thing we heard from it was that all the inhabitants were working together to fight a dangerous plague of rats. When people can get together for a common purpose they aren't lonesome.

A man told us the other day that the loneliest place he ever found was New York city, where he didn't

know a soul and his being there didn't matter to anyone. And he was right, but he set about changing that condition, and he didn't find even New York lonesome very long. For the loneliest place is no question of geography or population or economics. The loneliest place is always the human heart which hasn't learned how to reach out to other human hearts in the sure knowledge that there will be something in common, that if it has affection to spend, and loyalty and truth and friendliness, there are these things in return waiting to welcome it.—Milwaukee Journal.

A Culinary Wound.

They were discussing a case of shooting and one man ventured the opinion that the victim would get well. "Get well?" cried the other. "Get well! Who ever heard of a man with a bullet in his stomach getting well?"—Boston Transcript.

THREE YEAR OLD WASHED ASHORE

Mrs. Dingman Tells of Adventure of Childhood When Father's Ship Was Wrecked.

RELATES LATER EXPERIENCE

Declares That the Way Tanlac Restored Her Health Is More Remarkable Than Anything She Has Ever Had Happen to Her.

"I've had some remarkable experiences in my life, but none more wonderful than the way Tanlac overcame my troubles and made me gain twenty pounds," was the statement of Mrs. Christina K. Dingman, 1216 Alice St., Oakland, Calif. One of the experiences to which Mrs. Dingman refers is well known to her friends. When a child of three years, accompanying her father, a noted sea captain, on an ocean trip, the vessel was wrecked, but she was almost miraculously saved, the small box into which she was put being washed ashore. According to her statement, Mrs. Dingman enjoyed the best of health until three years ago when she began to suffer from a bad form of stomach trouble and later from rheumatism. How she was completely restored to health is best told in her own words:

"Nobody knows how I suffered for the past three years. No matter how carefully I ate I would endure agonies afterwards from smothering and sinking spells. Sometimes they were so severe I would fall to the floor and would have to be carried to bed. I went for days at a time without eating, as I dreaded the misery I knew would follow, no matter what I ate. Then rheumatism set in and my shoulders and arms hurt me so I couldn't comb my hair. My back felt like it was breaking in two.

"I was almost in the depths of despair when I began on Tanlac, but this grand medicine has made me a well and happy woman. I'm not even troubled with constipation now, thanks to the Laxative Tablets, which are far superior to anything of the kind I ever tried. It seems almost too good to be true, but here I am in the best of health and spirits after I had given up hope, and I'll always praise Tanlac for it."

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